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ABSTRACT

Since many senior academic administrators of colleges and universities first trained for academic careers in research and teaching, they have had minimal management training. Both academic and nonacademic officers with administrative experience find they must quickly develop the different knowledge and skills needed to manage an institution when they move into senior administrative positions. In surveys, organization and planning skills are seen by administrators as the most important, human skills are placed second, and financial management and control are ranked third. Professional development for management is accepted in business, industry, the military, and government. Although the benefits are easy to identify, value is difficult to quantify beyond anecdotal evidence. The benefits of professional development must also be balanced against the drawbacks of participating, including career timing, obsolescence of training, costs in time and money, and the issues of selection, integration, evaluation, and feedback. However, the evidence that does exist on the benefits still outweighs the disadvantages for many administrators. Effective professional development experiences must be part of an integrated, comprehensive organizational plan that links development activities with the actual tasks and responsibilities of the job. (MSE)

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Leadership in Higher Education

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American higher education continues to face difficult times. As the number of problems has grown over the past decades, the many constituencies of the higher education enterprise have searched for stronger managers and visionary leaders. It is not enough to be only an administrator or only a leader. Colleges and universities need leaders and managers who can turn their visions into reality.

Since many senior academic administrators of colleges and universities first trained for academic careers in research and teaching and scarcely anticipated their current administrative positions, they have had minimal management training. Both academic and nonacademic officers with years of administrative experience find that they must quickly develop the new and different knowledge and skills needed to manage an institution when they move into senior leadership positions. Likewise, administrators in senior positions must continue to grow as leaders while adapting to a constantly changing environment.

Although on-the-job training is best, mistakes can be costly to individuals and institutions. Reading is probably the most common way to acquire knowledge about management and leadership, but it is a passive learning mode. Professional development programs provide a more active alternative: they increase knowledge, add to and enhance management skills and leadership techniques, broaden perspectives, and stimulate creativity.

While many administrators enthusiastically embrace professional development programs, other administrators just as actively ignore them. Although such programs have existed in higher education almost as long as they have in business and industry, they have never achieved the same acceptance in education. A more complete understanding of the types and benefits of professional development programs as well as their problems and drawbacks may enable executives to take advantage of these programs as learning experiences.

For this investigation, a senior administrator is defined as a president or an officer who reports directly to the president, supervises a major division of the institution, and has substantive policy-setting responsibilities. A middle-level administrator manages a major enterprise within the academy and charts a future for that unit within the broad policy map established by the senior executive team. Professional development (including both management and leadership development) denotes programs that increase the capacity of individual to provide leadership, to be effective in their work and thereby improve the effectiveness and the quality of a college or university.

Career Paths Leading into Administration

It is necessary to identify various career paths to discern fully the development needs of administrators and to understand the reluctance of many to participate extensively in these programs. Many academic administrators began their careers as faculty members. Yet the department chair, the most common entry position into academic administration, has not been the first step of the majority. In addition to the traditional

ladder—department chair, dean, provost, and president—other paths are now just as common, including assorted entry-level positions within higher education institutions and in related areas of secondary education, education agencies and organizations. Non-academic administrators enter administration and rise through the ranks through another set of varied paths.

Because administrators follow many career paths their skills, knowledge, and expertise depend on their experiences. For every administrative and leadership strength developed and polished through on-the-job experience, just as many weaknesses are ignored because of lack of opportunity, time, or assessment.

Skills and Knowledge Required for Executive Positions

To understand the significance of professional development to all administrators, it is important to understand their responsibilities. In any consideration of administrative responsibilities, it is impossible to separate leadership and administrative responsibilities, since most leaders also must manage and most managers must occasionally lead.

Administrators, particularly senior executives, are responsible for developing visions and goals and for achieving them. Although others may actually run the systems and tend the processes, the senior officers are ultimately responsible for the operations that enable the complex enterprise of the modern college or university to function. The senior officers are responsible for the interrelationship between the environment and the institution. They must develop people, a working climate, and good communications.

In surveys of business, government, and secondary and higher education, administrators indicated that organization and planning skills were the most important, while human skills ranked second, with financial management and control, third.

Lessons Gained from Other Fields

Professional development for all management levels is accepted in business, industry, the military, and government. Business alone spends nearly $60 billion each year on professional development, with a significant percentage of that sum going to programs for senior administrators (Eurich 1985; Sonnenfeld 1983). Although colleges and universities offer the most prestigious of these executive programs, corporations have begun to compete with offerings from in-house institutes.

Benefits and Problems of Participation

Although the benefits of participating in professional development programs are easy to identify, value is difficult to quantify. Participants provide strong anecdotal evidence of the personal worth of those programs, but no comprehensive studies have surveyed several programs to collect quantitative evidence of benefits.

The knowledge derived from the curriculum is the most obvious benefit. Other benefits—less easily identifiable and described, but no less important—include new ideas, stimulation, contacts and networking, access to reference materials, team building, time for reflection and thought, increased promotability, increased access to senior positions for women and minorities, opportunities to augment previous experience through simulation, broadened perspectives, and increased self-confidence (Green 1988). Although the little evidence that exists only documents some of these benefits (for example, promotability and access), the myths surrounding some are pervasive and can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

These benefits must always be balanced against the drawbacks of participation, including career timing; the obsolescence of training; the costs in time and money; and the issues of selection, integration, evaluation and feedback.

Professional Development Issues Facing Higher Education Administrators

The evidence that does exist on the benefits—anecdotal, tentative, and personal as it may be—still outweighs the disadvantages for many administrators. The issue is then how to use professional development programs so that administrators and institutions can derive the greatest benefit. A fully integrated and dynamic plan requires the commitment not only of the executive participants but also of an institution's trustees.

To be most effective, professional development experiences need to be part of an integrated, comprehensive organizational plan that links development activities with the actual tasks and responsibilities of the job. Improved preparation can help participants absorb the experience with clear expectations about how the new information or skills will later be used. While much research on such related areas as adult development and learning styles already exists, further application still needs to be applied to management and leadership development. Foundations can continue to affect the leadership of colleges and universities by investing in professional development for administrators in a variety of ways.

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